THE GRAND GETAWAY

By A. H. C. MITCHELL

(Continued From Last Week)

He could almost count the number of persons he knew in San Francisco on the fingers of one hand. There was his landlady. She didn't count. There were the twins, Anderson, the young man Joe, and the men he was about to meet.

The only others in town he had had brief talk with were the Sunday editor, the man he hired his office of, and the janitor of the building. "And that's a plenty," he said to himself.

So when it came time to meet the detective who pretended he wanted a job, Hemenway had made up his mind to tie him up with a promise to work and string him along with a dollar a day until he was ready to pull up stakes.

"Well, my friend, how badly do you want a job?" was his greeting.

"I am ashamed to tell you," replied the gum shoe man.

"That being the case I'll give you a chance. I'm going off on an exploring expedition in a few days, and if you want to go along I'll give you twenty five dollars a month and board. I may be gone some time. Do you want it?"

"Sure I do."

Hemenway cut the conversation to a very few words.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Dennis McDonald."

"Scotch or Irish?"

"Both."

"What's your address?"

The man had one ready and Hemenway made a note of it. He curtly turned aside a question or two and then said:

"How are you fixed?"

"Broke."

"Well, here's a dollar. Meet me here tomorrow night at nine thirty. I take a walk about this time every night. That's all, I guess. They parted.

"I'm getting to be a very fancy liar," said Hemenway to himself as he strolled toward home. "Lucky I won't need to tell any more. I am running short of ammunition."

McDonald or whatever his real name was, went home and wrote out his nightly report. It was no more sensational than the previous document. No. 1370 it seemed was on his good behavior, and whatever they were trying to catch him at, or fasten on or discover, did not develop. McDonald wound up his report with a statement of his deal with Hemenway and promised developments in a few days.

When the developments did come, however, they were a little too swift for Mr. McDonald.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Hold Up Your Hands!"

On Sunday Hemenway took a day off, simple keeping his fences in repair by meeting the two men, one after the other in the park at night.

He said but two words to Joe. McDonald who tried to start a conversation, but Hemenway thrust a silver dollar in his hand and told him to be there the following night.

On Monday it was the same.

On Tuesday and Wednesday it was the same.

On Thursday Anderson reported everything stowed on board; water-tanks full; the yacht ready to sail at a moment's notice.

On Friday, Hemenway telephoned Anderson that he would take the schooner out for a sail early Sunday morning.

"Say," he said; "Marriott is back. Got a wire this morning. He must be in a hurry, as he says he will take the first train. Hello! I'm going to send a lot of truck down tomorrow. Put it all in the cabin, will you? Fine. Got the crew all rounded up? Fine. See you later. Good by."

Hemenway hung up the receiver. "Haven't slipped a cog yet," he said to himself. "Looks as though she was going through without a hitch."

That night Hemenway had a final talk with the two men in the park. He told them where to find the schooner; and instructed them to be there not later than seven o'clock Sunday morning.

When he reached home he told the twins everything was ready, promised to look after their baggage in the morning, warned them to be on hand at seven o'clock sharp, said he probably would not see them again until then, as he had some work of his own to do, and then went to bed for a good, long sleep.

The crucial test was near at hand. The next thirty hours would tell whether he was behind bars or fleeing over the trackless ocean with a fortune in the cabin of the schooner.

In the mean time the gum shoe man had never earned so easy a week's pay. Joe's life ever since McDonald had begun to shadow him had been as calm as that of a chess player. But with action promised for Sunday at the latest, the sleuth thought he had better talk things over with his chief.

So he went to headquarters on Saturday morning after shadowing his man safely to his place of business. The chief listened attentively, and at the end said:

"All right; we will go through with it that way. Want any help?"

That was where the sleuth overplayed himself.

"Hell, no!" he replied. "I'll handle that fellow all right. Leave it to me."

When Joe left his place of business that afternoon and leisurely walked down-town he was followed at a reasonable distance by the gum shoe man.

Joe made several purchases, dumped the bundles in a taxicab, and rode down to where the schooner lay, with McDonald trailing along in another taxi.

Joe had his bundles put on board and quickly drove away. He went to a hotel and ordered a fine dinner. The sleuth seized the opportunity to devour a sandwich and drink a glass of beer. Joe finished his dinner and called for his check.

"I may as well be hung for a sheep as for a goat," he mused as the waiter was making a lightning calculation. He drew a pocket check book from his clothes and with a fountain pen filled out a check for two hundred dollars.

"Here, George," he said to the waiter, "get this cashed for me. Tell the cashier to give me gold."

Yes, sir, Mr. Lent; right away, sir."

Paying his dinner check, Lent made the rounds of the saloons and cigar-stores where he was known and cashed checks ranging from five dollars to one hundred dollars each, stuffing the gold he received in the ten pockets of his trousers and waistcoat. In all he cleaned up close to twelve hundred dollars.

The sleuth was kept busy peering into windows and noting names and addresses while Lent was making his rounds. Finally Lent looked at his watch. "Too early for Isaacs," he thought.

He took in the tail end of a vaudeville show, played a game or two of billiards at the Palace, and then walked up Market street for half a mile, turned north for half a block, and went up the steps of a solid looking building.

He entered the vestibule and closed the door behind him. As he did so a panel of the inner door slid aside and a dim light shone on his features. There was a subdued click and the inner door opened noiselessly. Lent walked up stairs entered a room, and was at once greeted by a greasy looking, short and stout man who wore evening clothes.

"Good evening, Mr. Lent, you are a stranger."

"Busy on other things, Isaacs," replied Lent. "Besides you keep me broke." He glanced around the room. It was just an ordinary gambling joint to all outward appearances.

Two faro layouts, a roulette wheel and two card tables were placed where they would do the most good—or harm. There were fewer than ten men in the room, and Lent knew four of them to be employees of Isaacs.

"You don't seem to be very busy tonight. What is this—a prayer meeting?" observed Lent.

"I don't understand it myself," replied Isaacs; "this ought to be my busy night. Would you like to bet some of your money against mine?"

"You don't think I came around here for five o'clock tea do you?"

"Good! Come into the office and I'll deal for you."

Isaacs led the way to a small office back of the big room. In it were a boy's size desk, a safe, and a faro table. Lent sat down. Isaacs produced a deck of cards, tore off the cover, shuffled with the grace that comes of long experience, placed his hands, palms down, on the table and smiled at Lent.

"Well, give me some chips," said Lent.

"How many?"

"Hundred dollars will do."

Isaacs scrowled slightly. "You're starting in light," he remarked.

Lent flushed, but answered calmly: "Cut out the comment please."

Isaacs did not make reply but got the chips and collected five gold pieces. Lent placed a dollar chip on the tray of diamonds and another on the seven of spades, which he coppered. Isaacs snorted.

"I won't wear the skin off my fingers for that kind of betting; what's the matter with you?" he cried.

Lent looked him in the eye. "Isaacs," he said slowly, "you have taken about ten thousand dollars of my money in the past month. I'm playing my own system. Now you deal."

Isaacs grumbled, but began slipping the cards from the card. When the cards in the box became exhausted they had gotten action about six times At the end of an hour Lent was seventy dollars ahead. Isaacs kept baggering Lent to increase his bets.

"When luck is coming your way as it is tonight, why don't you press it?" he pleaded.

"What are you kicking about? You are getting off cheap," replied Lent, "There's my bet. Deal."

The hours went by, Isaacs monotonously dealing, Lent keeping cases and making his unvarying one dollar bets. Outside, in the big room, there was absolutely nothing doing. Daylight came. Isaacs let his employees go home, one by one. Only he and Lent remained. At last Isaacs hit the table with his fist.

"I got enough of this," he sneered. "You are making a sucker of me. I quit right here." He looked greasier than ever.

"Wait a minute Isaacs; don't be fussy," said Lent. He looked at his watch. "It is now exactly twenty minutes of seven. One more deal and I'll make you a bet that will stand your hair on end."

Isaacs gathered up the cards, shuffled them, and began a new deal. When it was completed he looked at Lent and said: "Well?"

"Get me a good stiff drink of whisky, call a taxicab, and then I'll bet you," said Lent.

Isaacs brought the whisky and stepped to the telephone.

"Tell them not to stop the motor, I'll be right down," Lent called out. A moment later Isaacs hung up the receiver and returned to his office. "What's your proposition?" said the gambler.

"Cash in these chips first," ordered Lent.

Isaacs did so.

"Now," said Lent, "I'll bet you a thousand dollars on the first turn of the cards."

"Where's your money," demanded Isaacs.

Lent went through his pockets and stacked a column of gold on the table.

"Where's yours?" he said. "Cover that money if you want my bet."

Isaacs shrugged his shoulders, went to his safe and matched Lent's pile. "You are putting me to a lot of trouble Mr. Lent, because I'm going to win your money anyway."

The noise of the taxi was heard as it drew up to the curb below.

"Are you?" cried Lent, slipping a revolver out of his pocket. "Throw up your hands! Up with them!" Lent stepped close and felt around the gambler's rear pockets. "Now take off your coat—take it off," he repeated quickly. "Now you dirty robber, I'm going to give you a taste of your own medicine. Put up your hands!"

Lent transferred his gun from right to left hand, stepped close again, and putting all the power he could muster into the blow, sent the right fist crashing into the stomach of the short, fat man in front of him.

Isaacs crumpled to the floor with a gasp. Lent was on top of him in an instant and choked him until he grew blue in the face. Then he whisked a small coil of wire and pair of pliers from his coat pocket, rolled the gambler over and first bound his ankles and then his wrists behind him. Next he shoved his handkerchief in Isaacs' mouth and tied the gambler's own handkerchief over it.

Still working rapidly he rifled the open safe of everything that looked like money, dumped gold and banknotes in the Tuxedo coat, rolled the whole thing up, cast a final glance at Isaacs, let himself out of the building jumped in the front seat of the taxi and cried: "Let her go!"

"Hey!" yelled Dennis McDonald, dashing out from the doorway opposite.

But the taxi did not stop.

CHAPTER IX.

Buckets of Gold.

Hemenway put in a very busy Saturday morning with his baggage and that of the twins, and with a score of many other things he had left until that day in order to keep his mind occupied.

He had placed all his eggs in one basket, and sink or swim, he had to go through with it as planned. It was now too late to change. By two o'clock in the afternoon he had cleaned up all the little odds and ends he could think of necessitating four or five trips to his office, and longed to visit the schooner to see if everything was all right.

But he was afraid to trust it, so called up Anderson instead, who assured him that things were being stowed aboard as fast as received.

"But say, where did you get all that baggage?" asked the ship chandler.

Hemenway lied glibly. "Most of that is Marriott's, he answered. "Well, so-long; I'll see you Monday. I will probably have another wire from Marriott by that time. Good by."

Then followed some nerve racking hours. Hemenway went home and threw himself on his bed. He tried to sleep, to read a newspaper, but couldn't.

"Cold blooded crooks may be all right in fiction, but they don't exist in real life," he mused. It was a relief when George Carteret came home with several bundles. Hemenway knocked on his door and entered.

"What's the matter? You look all in!" exclaimed George. "Perspiration is standing out all over your face and you are trembling."

"I told you I was a sick man and you wouldn't believe me. But I expect I will be all right when we get fairly under way."

They made talk for and hour or so. Then Hemenway invited George to dine with him, and they went down town. After a good dinner Hemenway felt his nervousness disappearing.

"I've got to relieve Jim, and I better be going," said George.

"All right. Got plenty of cigarettes?"

"You-bet."

"Pens and ink, paper and everything you need?"

"All fixed."

"Well, I'll see you on board at seven tomorrow. Better order a taxi to be at the house at six to serve as an alarm clock. So long."

Hemenway killed time until nine o'clock and when he arrived at his office the janitor was just about finishing up.

"Say, Mr. Janitor, my office is getting rather dusty. Come in on Monday and give it a cleaning will you?"

"Sure. Working tonight, Mr. Hemenway?"

"Yes; I have a lot of figuring to do." He unlocked his door. "And that's no lie," he added to himself as he locked the door behind him.

Hemenway pulled down the shades, unscrewed the tops of the boxes he had ordered, arranged the excelsior within, opened the trunk, and took out the trays.

He removed from the bottom of the trunk a suit case, a small, new lantern, a quart of kerosene oil, six bull's eye electric flashers, a suit of dungarees, jumper and overalls, a pair of rubber sandals, a clothesline, and twenty-three feet of rope ladder.

He took off his coat, vest, trousers, shirt, put on the dungarees, and slipped the sandals over his rubber heeled shoes.

He filled his lantern, moved a table in a corner of the room, turned up the rug underneath, put out the gas, and sat motionless in his chair for ten minutes.

At the end of that time he lighted a flasher, took a nail puller from the suit case, and removed the nails in a part of the exposed flooring. It was evident he had been over the ground before, as the nails yielded with hardly an effort.

"Pretty work," said Hemenway to himself as he removed the boards and disclosed a hole about three feet square. "I couldn't even tell myself where I had sawed those boards and pieced them together again. This old fogy bank won't know what struck it when I get through. They don't even keep a watchman here. He's a lucky fellow, too, if he only knew it, whoever he is. But to work, to work."

Hemenway lowered himself into the hole, his feet striking solid bottom at about four feet. Grabbing his flasher, he peered around. He was in a space about twelve feet square.

He was in fact in the walled up space directly over the bank's vault, and the solid bottom he was standing on was the top of the vault itself.

By nice calculation Hemenway had made the hole in the flooring over one corner of the vault. Stooping to avoid the beams overhead, he made his way to the front of the vault where he found, just where he had left them on his last previous visit there, two one-gallon demijohns and two tall narrow glass lipped pitchers.

These were placed within a circle that Hemenway had described with some care about two feet in diameter. This circle showed flashy and irregular edges, as though some acid had eaten into the steel of the vault.

"Ha!" exclaimed Hemenway under his breath. "Everybody on the mark, all set and ready for the pistol. Well, here goes, and may the best man win."

He uncorked the two demijohns, filled one pitcher from one of them and the second pitcher from the other. Into the jagged groove of the circle he poured from the first pitcher until he had completed the circumference Then taking the second pitcher he began, with extreme care, to pour the contents in the same groove.

The effect was strange and wonderful. When the two liquids met there was a bubbling like peroxid on raw flesh. The steel began to soften, and when the bubbling ceased, as it did after a time when the mixture lost its potency, there remained a kind of watery mud.

This Hemenway removed with a stiff brush and then repeated the process of pouring one liquid on the other. At the end of an hour he was gratified to hear a splashing on the floor of the vault from the point where the liquid had eaten through.

Ten minutes later the section of steel within the circle fell to the floor of the vault landing with a sharp crash.

As luck would have it a street car passed with a whirl the instant the heavy steel fell, deadening the sound. The impact however, jarred the building.

Hemenway shut off his light, poked his head through the hole above and listened. There wasn't a footfall outside, there wasn't a sound within. Hemenway stood there without moving for a full twenty minutes. Then rapidly, but silently, he went to work completing his job.

Everything had been carefully thought out in advance. A bucket of water and a stiff paint brush lay within reach of the office floor.

Dipping the brush in the water he scrubbed the sides of the steel circle until he thought there was no danger of contact with his hands.

"That's hot stuff," he soliloquized. "I've never tried it on my mitts and I don't guess I want to."

He lighted his lantern, fastened the rope ladder in hooks he had screwed in the beam over the circle and descended into the vault. Placing his lantern on the floor, he brought down the suit case which contained various implements and chemicals, and began work on the doors of the compartments.

When the last door swung open he looked at his watch. It was fifty minutes after midnight. He was in a dripping perspiration, dead tired, and the air in the vault was stifling. Begrudging the time, he went aloft and lay flat on his office floor for a ten-minute rest.

When a distant church clock struck one, Hemenway arose, took the clothes line lowered himself down the hole, emptied the bucket, tied the clothes line to its handle, lowered it to the bottom of the vault and descended after it.

He wasted no time in contemplation, but grabbing bags of gold, he filled the bucket, climbed the ladder, pulled up the bucket and noiselessly placed the contents on the floor of his office.

He repeated this performance three or four times, then packed the bags in the boxes, wedged excelsior wherever it was needed, screwed down the tops, shook the boxes to make sure there was no clink of coin, and then descended for more.

He drew up all the bags he could find, and then started in on the green-and yellow backs. After these came the securities. These with the bills, he placed in boxes too, as he had provided plenty of them. When he had finished there wasn't enough left in the vault to start a child's penny bank.

Hemenway descended once more, took a last look around to be sure he hadn't missed anything, blew out his lantern, ascended the rope ladder, climbed through the hole to his office, and put back the flooring. Then he drew the corner of the rug over it, replaced the table, swept up the excelsior and disposed of it in the trunk with the tools and other odds and ends.

He took off his overalls and sandals threw them in the trunk, locked the trunk, washed his face and hands, put on his clothes, sat down in his chair and drew a deep breath.

He looked at his watch again. It was three-twenty. His labor had consumed time, but all his movements aboveboard had been made with extreme caution.

Then a thought flashed through his mind that brought out the cold sweat. What if the boys failed to show up at the dock! And what if the truckmen he had engaged failed to appear!

Oh, well he had all day and all night before him. He could pick up a crew of old salts if it came to the worst, and truckmen were not hard to find, even if it was Sunday.

But for all that the next three hours were the longest he ever put in. Daylight came. Five o'clock came, then six. He began to get figety and listened for every sound.

Finally there was a far off rumble like a truck, and he went down to the entrance to meet it and keep his eyes open for policemen. He had the proper kind of lies ready for any officer of the law that might stroll along, but he wished to avoid all that.

Yes, it was the truck with two men on it. Inside of seven minutes trunk and boxes were loaded.

Hemenway cast a last look around his little office, locked the door, walked down the stairs jumped on the truck, and then started, slowly as befitted the day, toward the water front.

As the team turned the corner Hemenway blew a kiss to the silent and ruined bank, but as he did so he became aware that he was trembling violently.

CHAPTER X.

"You're a Dirty Cur.'

Shortly after seven o'clock on Sunday morning Hemenway, Lent, McDonald and the twins were converging on Anderson & Brownlow's dock from various points of the compass.

The Carterets got there first, and the old watchman came out rubbing his eyes when they drove up in a taxicab.

"What do you want around here?" he said. "This is no public wharf."

"We are with the crowd that's going on the schooner yacht."

"Oh, you are with Mr. Hemenway's party. All right. I got orders to let you have the yacht. How long will you be gone?"

"About a year, I guess," replied George.

"A year? Mr. Anderson told me you was only going out for a sail on the bay."

Jim grew impatient. "Settle for the taxi, George," he said; and to the watchman: "Mr. Hemenway will be here in a minute and will give you all the details about it. In the mean time help us get these things aboard please."

He passed two bits to the watchman and unloaded the car of suit cases and bundles.

"Now then George, we want to get an early start. Suppose we change our clothes and be all ready for the other fellows," said Jim.

They went aboard. The watchman fumbled in his pockets for a key and unlocked the companionway, slid back the top and the boys went below. Trunks, boxes and bundles were scattered all over the floor of the cabin. The twins made no attempt to straighten things out, but hustled into old trousers, soft shirts, sneakers, and caps, and went on deck.

It was a glorious morning. A good eight knot breeze was blowing a little west of north. Off to the east the sun on the water was blinding. There was not a cloud in the sky. The boys began busying themselves about the deck.

Jim took most of the stops off the fore and mainsails, while George went forward and freed the jib sheet. Then purely out of curiosity he unclamped the fore hatch, removed the cover, and peered into the hold. As he did so there was a rattle on the dock and George looked up to see Hemenway jump off a truck and give some sharp orders to the men with him.

"Good morning skippers!" cried Hemenway. "I see you are on hand bright and early. I'll be ready to take orders as soon as I get this junk aboard."

"Junk it is, be the heft of it," remarked one of the truckmen who was struggling with one of Hemenway's boxes.

Hemenway looked around nervously.

"Where are the other fellows?" he asked.

"We were the first ones here," answered George. "Say, the watchman wants to see you. He says he understood we were only going out for a day's sail."

"Is that so. What did you tell him?"

"We told him to see you."

"That's the stuff! I'll straighten him out. Hey there!" he yelled to the watchman. "I want to see you!"

And when the guardian of the dock came up he took him aside and said: "Say we are going to take the yacht outside today to see how she behaves on the real ocean. We'll be back before sundown unless the wind goes back on us. Here's a couple of bones for you. Help those men get those boxes aboard."

The watchman shuffled off and Hemenway began to bite his nails in sheer nervousness and talk to himself. "I wonder where the devil those other two fellows are. Here it is seventwenty five, me with everything right in my hand and held up by those ginks. I could murder them without turning a hair."

He walked up the dock, walked back again, paid off the truckmen, and hailed the watchman.

"Say have you seen a tall young fellow in a black felt hat around here this morning or last night?"

"Yes, sir; there was a young fellow drove up here in a taxicab last night about sundown. He gave me some bundles to put on board the schooner and then drove off again."

Hemenway breathed easier. "You didn't see a shorter and stouter man about thirty five years old down here last night did you?"

"No, sir; the young fellow was the only one."

"That'll be Joe, I guess," said Hemenway to himself walking off. "He'll be here all right but I bet that other fellow throws me down. By gee! I'll go with four, if the twins will stand for it."

Then, a moment later: "But I haven't got four yet. Now, wouldn't that make a saint swear?" and suiting the thought to the word he let out a few subdued but fervent oaths. This seemed to relieve him.

He remembered he had all day and all night before him; that there was no chance of the bank robbery being discovered before Monday morning. He had more than twenty four hours in which to make good his getaway.

He cheered up. He would give the two delinquents a little more leeway, and then if they failed to appear he would seek professional aid to complete his crew. He could afford it now, he told himself. He hadn't the slightest idea how much plunder he had stowed away in the boxes and trunk, but he figured he was on Easy Street for life. For the moment he forgot his troubles and a smile of satisfaction bespread his care worn face.

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of a motor car in the distance. The sound ceased, and Hemenway walked out to see what was doing. A block away he saw a man that looked like Joe talking to the chauffeur. It was Joe, and this is what Joe was saying:

"How much do I owe you? All right, here you are. Now how much to the Cliff House and return? Very well, here it is. Now you go there and inquire for Mr. George U. Schlessenger. If he's there, tell him I'm here, and bring him back with you. If he isn't there, come back anyhow, and I'll meet you right here. Wait for me."

The taxicab started off and Lent, with his black bundle walked toward the dock. Hemenway was waiting for him with a grin on his face.

"Hello, Joseph," he said; "I thought you were never coming. What made you stop a block away from the dock, and what have you got in your arms?"

"That's a Tuxedo coat," replied Joe. "I thought I might need it at some function down in the tropics. As for the other thing, I don't want everybody to know my business, as you know, so I just stopped some distance back and sent the driver off on a wild goose chase. By the time he returns we ought to be some miles out, don't you think so?"

"You are beginning to loosen up a bit," remarked Hemenway. "First thing you know you'll be telling me your family history. Come on now and get into some old clothes. We will be starting off right away, and you've got to work your passage, you know.

"And by the way, I've got to introduce you to the other fellows, so you will have to give me your name. Mine's Hemenway."

"Mine's Lent," he said.

"All right, jump aboard. Mr. Carteret, shake hands with Mr. Lent—Mr. Joseph Lent—Joe for short. Joe, this is Mr. George Carteret and here is Mr. James Carteret, Mr. Lent. Before long you will be able to tell one from the other. They are both shippers, so you see we are very fancy on this boat.

"Gents, Mr. Lent will act as deck-hand, the same as myself. Hoping these few lines will find you well, I remain, your warm and personal friend, John L. Sullivan.

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